

# The romance of rail

*Luxury rail journeys are the latest sybaritic pleasure for the well-heeled traveller who wishes to evoke the magic of locomotive travel.*



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It is said that J.K. Rowling got her inspiration for the character of Harry Potter aboard a train from Manchester to London. Perhaps it's because long-distance train travel reeks of magic, adventure and intrigue, making it a perfect setting to inspire her iconic bestseller. The finest way to experience the most beautiful and least trampled landscapes around the world in the opinion of not just Rowling but others is on the railroad. From the gleaming umber and cream carriages boasting veneered panels and art deco marquetry to the liveried waiters that greet you with a flourish, there's no finer way to view the English countryside than aboard The Belmond British Pullman.

## The Revival Of Rail Travel

What makes this journey so spectacular is not just the up close views of the riveting scenery but the history of the Belmond fleet-as legendary as the journey itself. With the advent of air travel, the railways were suddenly relegated to being too slow, tedious and old-fashioned. As a result, many luxury trains were in disuse and carriages fell into disrepair. The lucky ones were bought by rail enthusiasts; others were left to languish in railway sidings or sent to the scrap heap.

Luckily, in 1977, everything changed at a Sotheby's auction in Monte Carlo. In attendance was James B Sherwood, who harboured a dream to revive the legendary Orient Express that would otherwise be forgotten. Over the next few years he painstakingly located all the lost carriages, eventually acquiring 35 historic sleepers, Pullmans and Restaurant cars. The Pullmans were kept for the leg of the famed transcontinental route. Named after the American, George Mortimer Pullman, who designed trains to be "palaces on wheels" offering true comfort and delectable cuisine, the Pullmans were synonymous with luxury train travel.



Menus feature the finest seasonal British produce

## All Aboard

On board the Belmond British Pullman train, the legendary rail cars have been impeccably restored to pristine glory and time stands still amidst the hallowed carriages with their inlaid marquetry and gleaming brass. "Step on board and the real world evaporates behind you"-is the thought that comes to mind as we prepare to disconnect ourselves from the outside world and thunder down the tracks. Guests are transported to an era of 1920's glamour and mystique and 'Murder on The Orient Express' fantasies begin to run riot as the train prepares to depart from London's Victoria Station.

The Belmond British Pullman can carry up to 226 passengers and the carriages seat between 20 and 26 passengers in each. On board, passengers are seated in either 'coupe's' (small compartments seating up to four people) or in the open car mostly at tables for two. Ushered to our seats with their Liberty-print upholstery, we immediately perk up when we see that the interiors of each of our 11 carriages are dazzlingly different.

With names such as Audrey, Vera and Minerva and individually designed marquetry, they once formed part of a historic luxury train and each has its own story to tell: some carriages were used by royalty, others took part in the Festival of Britain or starred in movies. The stunning wood panelling in our carriages was restored by the Dunn family who are experts in the rare craft of marquetry. The interiors of the carriage are appropriately grandiose and almost upstage the stunning scenery if that's possible at all.

## A Historical Treat

It's easy to mingle with guests on board; a retired naval captain, housewives from Bath and a young honeymooning couple who are as excited as we are to be on board. Soon its time for the famed silver service Our table is set with starched white linen, specially commissioned china and sparkling cut glassware for a faultless, attentive dining service. Menus feature the finest seasonal British produce, from guinea fowl and sea bream to smoked salmon and magnificent cheeses, all expertly prepared by the executive head chef and his team. Drinks are similarly delectable: Champagne Laurent-Perrier and sommelier-selected wines in fluted glasses make the rounds.

A delectable menu of smoked Scottish Salmon and Roast beef followed by a seasonal strawberry tart with creme anglaise and a cheese board with home made chutney have us in gastronomic paradise notwithstanding the views of the countryside and its rolling hills. And we owe praise to the talented chefs who cook up a feast in a tiny galley kitchen even catering to a last minute vegetarian guest on board. As we pass through scenic Kent also known as 'The Garden of England' a surprise awaits us! The train halts abruptly in rural England and we are ushered out. "Have the coaches developed a mechanical problem?" asks one passenger anxiously?

Before we have a chance to worry we hear the strains of a jazz band and see waiters appear magically with trays of oysters and champagne. It's a surprise treat for Valentines day we are informed by the ever-attentive staff. After swaying to Ella Fitzgerald and way too much Champagne, we totter reluctantly back on board, guided by our liveried waiters, as they lend us a helping hand to climb back on and savour the final few moments of our luxury escape into a bygone era of glamour and style.

## Fact File

The Belmond British Pullman offers a variety of train journeys thematically based for special occasions like Mother's Day, Valentine's Day to journeys highlighting great British monuments in Bath, Canterbury and Cambridge as well as sporting events across Britain.